

Notes from the Breeding Cage

This is the first of an occasional series of notes on all aspects of breeding and rearing in captivity. Readers are invited to contribute short notes for possible inclusion – Editor.

I was surprised to see that a female *Cyclophora linearia* Hbn. kept for egg-laying, had laid some eggs on a hair which had fallen into the container. On mentioning this circumstance to Mr. J. Porter, he replied that many of the smaller Geometridae will readily lay eggs on human hair. Accordingly, I put just three or four hairs (freshly plucked) with each female, and my experience this summer has been that many moths, including *C. punctaria* L., *Idaea vulpinaria* H.-S., *Timandra griseata* Petersen, *Xanthorhoe quadri-fasiata* Clerck, *X. designata* Hufn., *X. spadicearia* D. & S. and *Eupithecia succenturiata* L. laid on the hair as well as on tissue or net, but that *I. aversata* L. and *I. seriata* Schrank laid solely on the hair (J. Halsey).

There is an additional pleasure for the lepidopterist who grows his soft fruit in a cage, for as well as increased fruit yield he has colonies of geometers protected from birds. Within the shelter of the cage, *Semiothisa wauaria* L. on currant and gooseberry, and *Eupithecia assimilata* Dbdy. and *Eulithis mellinata* F. on currants, will display large larval broods subject only to control by parasites. I have found that aphid attack can be controlled by discrete application of systemic insecticides well before the fruit is formed and this does not injure caterpillars. Defoliation by sawfly larvae still must be prevented by hand-picking however (G. M. Haggett).

A simple and inexpensive method of rearing lepidopterous larvae in captivity where, for example, photography and cost are the two main concerns: this system, which incorporates a removable cover, facilitates photography without disturbing the larvae. The complete system consists mainly of a cover and base which can be bought cheaply from most garden centres. The cover is a flower pot propagator which is stood inside a pot base, which has been drilled centrally with a ½" hole. The pot base is glued to the lid of the jar so that the holes are in-line. The food plant must be passed through the hole and plugged with cotton wool to prevent the larvae falling into the reservoir. The cover is stood on the base over the plant, and has two holes in the top covered with muslin. A vent should be cut in the lower end of the cover and a piece of muslin glued over the opening to prevent misting, and in conjunction with the upper vent holes, this provides a good air flow. Because the base and cover are made of plastic, these can be cleaned very easily, removal of frass etc. is achieved without disturbing the larvae, and observation facilitated by the clear cover. For rearing difficult species, the cover may be placed over a standard plastic flower pot containing growing food plant, and overwintering can also be carried out in this way. Some species will require a little moss laid inside the container in which to retire, but this should first be scalded to destroy any predators and dried, after which it may be used several